

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

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O R 221543Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8790

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 4846

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE, UR, PLO

SUBJECT: DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAYDAR COMMENTS ON LEBANON;

DOWNPLAYS REPORTS OF SOVIET PRESSURES ON SYRIA

### 1. SUMMARY:

HAYDAR PREDICTS THAT ASAD'S JULY 20 ATTACK ON PLO LEADERSHIP WILL COMPLICATE SYRO-PLO RECONCILIATIONS SEES CHRISTIANS AS NOW DETERMINED TO PURSUE FURTHER MILITARY GAINS. CONSIDERS REPORTS OF SOVIET PRESSURES ON SYRIA TO BE EXAGGERATED. U.S. CAN PLAY USEFUL BACKSTAGE ROLE ENCOURAGING LEBANESE DIALOGUE AS WELL AS SAUDIS AND EGYPTIANS TO WORK HARDER FOR A CEASE-FIRE.

### 2. SYRIAN-POL RELATIONS:

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS MOHAMMAD

HAYDAR TOLD ME JULY 22 HE REMAINED OPTIMISTIC THAT

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LEBANESE CRISIS WAS MOVING TOWARDS A SOLUTION BUT

SEVERAL MORE WEEKS WERE NEEDED FOR A DECISIVE BREAK. KEY WAS SYRIAN-PLO RECONCILIATION AND HARD LINE TAKEN BY PRESIDENT ASAD IN HIS JULY 20 SPEECH TOWARDS PLO LEADERSHIP HAD COMPLICATED MATTERS. "IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASIER TO WORK OUT A RECONCILIATION BEFORE THE SPEECH, HAYDAR SAID. SYRIA COULD NOT MOVE "MONE CENTIMETER" FROM THE PRESIDENT'S LINE AND RECONCILIATION WOULD THEREFORE DEPEND ON PLO'S FLEXIBILITY. PLO DELEGATION, LED BY FAROUK KADDUMI, WHICH ARRIVED IN DAMASCUS LAST NIGHT WAS SCHEDULED TO COME BEFORE THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH. HAYDAR BELIEVES THAT THE FACT THAT THE DELEGATION HAD ARRIVED WAS PROBABLY LARGELY OWING TO PRESSURE ON ARAFAT BY LIBYAN PRIME MINISTER JALLUD. HAYDAR UNDERSTANDS TODAY'S TALKS BETWEEN SYRIANS AND PLO WILL BE PURELY EXPLORATORY AND THAT KADDUMI HAS COME WITHOUT AUTHORITY TO COMMIT THE PLO TO ANY NEW POSITIONS. HAYDAR SAID HE PERSONALLY COULD APPRECIATE THIS BECAUSE WERE THE PLO TO MODIFY ITS STAND TODAY, IT WOULD BE READ BY EVERY ONE AS ABJECT SURRENDER TO DAMASCUS.

3. ONE OF SYRIA'S PRINCIPAL PROBLEMS IN DEALING WITH THE PLO IS THAT YASSIR ARAFAT HAS NEVER BEEN FRANK WITH ASAD. ARAFAT IS SO ACCUSTOMED TO HAVING TO PLEASE ALL OF THE FACTIONS IN HIS OWN ORGANIZATION THAT HE HAS DEVELOPED AN UNFORTUNATE HABIT OF APPEARING TO AGREE WITH EVERYONE, EVEN NON-PALESTINIANS. AS A RESULT ASAD HAS COME TO DISTRUST HIM, FEELING THAT ARAFAT HAS BETRAYED A NUMBER OF COMMITMENTS MADE TO HIM OVER THE PAST YEAR. NONETHELESS, HAYDAR SAID HE WAS OPTIMISTIC THAT CONCRETE STEPS TOWARDS PLO-SYRIAN RECONCILIATION WOULD BE TAKEN IN LESS THAN A MONTH'S TIME.

#### 4. CHRISTIAN AMBITIONS:

HAYDAR MODIFIED HIS COMMENTS OF JULY 15 (DAMASCUS 4640) ABOUT THE WILLINGNESS OF THE CHRISTIANS TO REFRAIN FROM FURTHER ATTEMPTS AT MILITARY VICTORIES IN LEBANON. HE SAID THE CHRISTIANS NOW SEEM TO FEEL THEY HAVE A "GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY" TO CLEAR PALESTINIANS OUT OF THE CHRISTIAN AREAS; THE METN CAMPAIGN WOULD PROBABLY BE THEIR NEXT

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MAIN PUSH. HAYDAR SAID THAT HE BELIEVED THE ONLY REALISTIC GOAL FOR THE CHRISTIANS IN DEALING WITH THE PALESTINIANS WAS TO CONTROL THE ARMAMENTS IN PALESTINIAN CAMPS. THE CAMPS THEMSELVES HAVE BEEN IN THEIR PRESENT LOCATIONS SINCE THE LATE '40S. (HE EVEN THOUGHT THE CHRISTIANS SHOULD PERMIT UNARMED CIVILIAN PALESTINIANS TO RETURN TO TEL ZA'TAR.) HE DEPLORED REPORTS THAT CHAMOUN HAD ORDERED HIS FORCES TO OPEN FIRE YESTERDAY IN BEIRUT AS THE SAUDI FORCES TOOK UP

THEIR POSITIONS ON THE LINE DIVIDING CHRISTIAN FROM LEFTIST/  
PALESTINIAN CONTROLLED AREAS IN THE CAPITAL.

5. SOVIET ROLE:

COMMENTING ON RUMORS THAT THE SOVIET UNION HAD THREATENED  
TO CUT OFF MILITARY SUPPLIES AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO  
SYRIA, HAYDAR SAID HE BELIEVED THESE TO BE EXAGGERATED.  
THEY WERE SELF-SERVING TRANSLATIONS OF SOVIET "PROMISES  
TO BE HELPFUL" TO THE LEBANESE COMMUNIST PARTY, THE LIBYANS  
AND THE PLO WHICH THOSE ORGANIZATIONS WERE ELEVATING  
INTO COMMITMENTS FOR SPECIFIC SOVIET ACTIONS AGAINST SYRIA.  
HE HAD READ AN ARABIC TRANSLATION OF THE THREATENING LETTER  
PUBLISHED IN "LE MONDE" ALLEGEDLY SENT BY BREZHNEV TO ASAD AND  
CONSIDERED IT TO BE A FORGERY. (COMMENT: HAYDAR DID NOT  
SAY WHETHER HE HAD DISCUSSED THE BREZHNEV LETTER WITH ASAD.)  
THIS WAS NOT TO DENY THERE WAS TENSION BETWEEN THE SYRIANS  
AND THE SOVIETS OVER SYRIAN INTERVENTION IN LEBANON, AS HE  
HAD NOTED IN OUR LAST MEETING. AT THIS POINT, I  
EMPHASIZED OUR INTEREST IN SYRIA'S BEING ABLE TO PURSUE  
ITS INDEPENDENT NATIONAL POLICY.

6. HAYDAR NOTED IN PASSING THAT POTENTIAL PRESSURE POINTS  
ON SYRIA IN SOVIET HANDS WERE ONLY IN THE MILITARY SPHERE.  
WITH THE VIRTUAL COMPLETION OF THE EUPHRATES DAM, SYRIA'S  
ECONOMIC RELATIONS WITH THE SOVIET UNION HAD SHRUNK  
AND WERE TODAY PROBABLY OF LESS VOLUME THAN THOSE BETWEEN  
SYRIA AND AMERICA.

7. U.S.-ROLE:

HAYDAR URGED THAT WE CONTINUE OUR EFFORTS TO ENCOURAGE  
A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE LEBANESE FACTIONS. I SAID THIS  
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HAD BEEN OUR CONSISTENT APPROACH EVER SINCE THE CONFLICT  
HAD BEGUN. HE REPLIED THAT HE THOUGHT THE ATMOSPHERE  
FOR US WAS NOW MORE RECEPTIVE. HE EMPHASIZED  
THAT WE SHOULD PURSUE SUCH EFFORTS QUIETLY. TOO MUCH  
PUBLICITY HAD ATTENDED DEAN BROWN'S MISSION TO LEBANON.  
I NOTED THE DIFFICULTY WE HAD IN CONTACTING THE  
MARONITE LEADERSHIP UNDER PRESENT CONDITIONS IN BEIRUT.  
HE SAID IF THIS CONTINUED, THEN WE SHOULD ARRANGE SUCH  
CONTACTS IN EITHER CYPRUS OR SYRIA. THE U.S. IN HIS  
OPINION COULD ALSO PLAY A VALUABLE ROLE IN GETTING THE  
EGYPTIANS AND SAUDIS TO BE "MORE ENTHUSIASTIC" ABOUT A  
CEASE-FIRE IN LEBANON. KUWAIT HE DISMISSED AS  
UNABLE TO PLAY ANY USEFUL ROLE IN LEBANON; IT WAS TOO  
AFRAID OF THE PALESTINIANS.

8. COMMENT:

HAYDAR WAS HIS USAUL FRANK SELF, AS SHOWN  
IN HIS CRITICISM OF HIS OWN PRESIDENT'S MAJOR POLICY STATEMENT.  
HAYDAR'S MISESTIMATE OF CHRISTIAN MILITARY INTENTIONS ONLY A  
WEEK AGO INDICATES HOW THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE LEBANESE  
CONFLICT CAN MISLEAD EVEN SO SHREWD AND WELL PLACED  
OBSERVER AS HIMSELF.  
MURPHY

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## Message Attributes

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